

# **A CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING AND VALUES FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**The Scottish Government is seeking views on the common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for all those working with children, young people and families. Once implemented the common core will support the development of more effective and integrated services which in turn will promote more flexible development and career progression for the workforce and will make communicating across organisational boundaries and cultures easier.**

# A Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland



## RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

### 1. Name/Organisation

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### 3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

Group/Organisation

*Please tick as appropriate*

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

*Please tick ONE of the following boxes*

Yes, make my response, name

and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

*Please tick as appropriate*

Yes

No



## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### 1. **Workers need to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build the capacity of children, young people and families.**

**To what extent do you agree that the proposed common core equips our workers to do this?**

SOSCN fully supports the need to tackle inequalities; build capacities of children, young people and families, and, where appropriate, provide early intervention where difficulties or problems emerge, or indeed, to prevent them from arising in the first place.

The core skills, knowledge and understanding set out here are only some of essential components of the *processes* involved in addressing these aims. This point is expanded much further, in the reply to Q5 below.

Looking at tackling inequalities, for example, how can this be done without first gaining some basic knowledge and understanding of the context of *children's lives within their culture and society*, as well as the ways in which they and their families act on, and respond to, such cultural forces (for example racism, or the widespread blaming of people in poverty for their circumstances)? This knowledge should also be further underpinned by a value and ethical base; such as commitment to the UNCRRC, and GIRFEC.

Tackling inequality involves critical reflection on the part of the worker, in terms of their own views and those of their colleagues, services, institutions and community. They would also need to know about strategies, resources and activities to tackle inequality that they might have at their disposal. They also should be able to identify such resources for the children and families they work with, in order to provide meaningful support.

One of the common core areas is for:

"knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity, cultural differences, disability and how they impact on partnership working with families and communities"

This knowledge in itself does not address inequality; I do not think that the common core area above is quite enough here, not least because children are missing from this statement. There should be knowledge and understanding of how such differences impact on their lives, and what skills, resources and activities are required to address such differences.

For example, in our work with school age childcare services, in order to meet our quality standards, it is not enough that they have a commitment to equality in policy statements or have knowledge gained through staff training, it has to be demonstrated in practice at all levels, from reaching out to the various cultural communities they might serve; to the food they provide and the skills they use in day to day practice to engage inclusively with the children and families accessing their services.

SOSCN was involved in the Children in Scotland led 'Working it Out', and 'Working for Inclusion' – programmes of work. And we also have, for many years now, provided annual six month work placements for Danish students doing the BA in social education (pedagogy), so we are familiar with the core skills and knowledge required of them for this course.

Whilst the common core skills sought here need to be applicable across a range of professions, with very different training pathways, and therefore need to be far more broadly based than an intensive BA course, there are some elements of the various social pedagogy courses which might be quite useful to adapt to this Scottish context.

This includes:

Reflexive critical practice based on an understanding of child development and children's place in community, culture and society.

The importance of forming trusted relationships with children and their families

A recognition of child agency linked to practice using a children's rights approach

An emphasis on gaining and using a range of communication skills with children, families, colleagues and for confident liaison with different professionals.

Using specific practical skills in activities such as sports, nature, technology, arts, drama and music to deliver social education aims, values and outcomes

Ethical values and understanding of equality, inclusion and exclusion

Joint planning and co-delivery of services, engage in inter-professional discussions and learning about other's professional roles.

## **2. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "sound observation, judgement and decision making?"**

Knowledge of children and young people's development is essential. To this we should add understanding the role of the adult in supporting such development; not just in order to identify issues and problems, but in order to support every child's individual development needs.

Sound observation skills are of course essential in work with children; this should be aligned with gaining knowledge of the child's needs, from the child herself, from the child's carer, family and of other significant others in

their lives.

The parts here about judgement, when to intervene and balancing risk do read very much like social work assessment of child protection risks, rather than as applicable to the broader workforce....many staff in school age childcare will be making such judgements in everyday practice with children, in terms of play and risk situations, child protection, or where children have issues or problems at home or school. They would also be getting to know a child, their like's dislikes, friends family, pets, in the process of creating bonds with a child in order to develop a lasting, trusting relationship.

It should be clear that getting to know a child and some basic knowledge of development is necessary to a wider range of roles, and this should be also placed within the contexts of children's rights through the UNCRC and ensuring their participation in decisions, large and small.

### **3. What specific comments do you have around the skills and knowledge associated with “appropriate and effective communication”?**

While we broadly agree with the core skills and knowledge listed, this a very sparse list of skills and knowledge, and if we are taking the UNCRC into account in this section it is essential that staff either gain or utilise the many forms of communication available in order that children's own voices are heard in the service provided.

This area should emphasis that communication can take many forms, including BSL, using talking mats; technology, makaton, and ensuring the use of reliable interpreters in order that children, and their families, using different languages, or forms of communication, written or spoken, are able to give their own opinions and have a say in things which are important to them.

Furthermore, while we are pleased to see children's rights mentioned, it should also be made clear that play, drawing, stories, photos, diaries and again skilled observations, are amongst the many communicative strategies available to enable even very young children, or children with complex needs, to participate in communicative processes.

This section seems to carry a presumption of a one way direction for communication from the worker to children and families. In fact one of the most basic communication skills is in being a good, active listener; learning how to pay attention to people, and then to reflect and feedback on your understanding

**4. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “effective partnership and multi-agency working?”**

While this section does bring in cultural diversity and equality – see Q1 comments above and Q 5 below for the need for this to be embedded within a theoretical framework.

We agree for the need for interagency collaboration and for professionals to all work together to support children and families. We represent a particular sector, which is often ignored or marginalised by other professionals, despite having a crucial role in supporting children and families, and being well placed to deliver actions to improve children’s day to day and future lives.

Staff in school age childcare form close trusting relationships with children and families and know the development, social and emotional needs of the children in their care. The particular professional barrier they often face is with teaching and other staff in schools. There needs to be action taken to share learning across professions, about the value of the many forms of care and support children receive. This situation is doubly difficult for staff who also work in the school as classroom assistants, often working with the same children later in the day in out of school care. The opportunities to provide holistic support to children, when school and out of school staff work constructively together are immense, and there are examples of such practice across Europe, which show the benefits to children of this joint work.

While there now involvement of some well qualified professional school age childcare leaders in, for example, supporting social work intervention, too often such staff, who know a great deal about child development and the children in their care, are not asked to be involved in case conferences etc.

This is perhaps perpetuated also by creating self limiting boundaries. Throughout the sections there is a phrase “within the parameters of your role”; part of our work is in ensuring that professionally trained leaders in school age childcare know that they are equal professionals who should be further involved in supporting families, in partnership with other professionals.

We are not at all clear about what is meant by the very broad statement that everyone should show leadership in every role and in every organisation. Leadership is a specific skill, and, in most organisations, a specific role. Of course, people should use initiative and act quickly in particular situations, where they have responsibility, or where there are particular circumstances, but we are not sure it is intended to apply to everyone at every stage of their involvement in services for children.

## 5. What if anything is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?

Put together, the values and common core skills, knowledge and understanding set out in this paper are, of course, essential and we agree with their inclusion.

There are, however, significant gaps between, for example, the proposed benefits set out for the common core, and the actual core skills identified, many of which are rather broadly defined, no doubt in recognition of the huge range of the workforce they cover. Whilst there is an emphasis on the need to develop and deliver clear communication across professional silos; there should be an equally or indeed more heavily weighted emphasis on the need to communicate clearly with children and families, with the stress on listening and learning from them.

What seems to be missing is a unifying, overarching, theoretical understanding of what is meant by children and childhood. Any common core of knowledge and skills for the children's workforce has to start from that point. Therefore, for example, "taking a whole child approach", has to be defined, within that theoretical basis. This should not be a deficit approach, but one where all children's own capacity to act is recognised and where their choices are respected and understood, within the context of their day to day lives.

Children's lives are inexorably linked with wider society, and this is touched on at various points (in the combination of the set of values, especially GIRFEC, and core skills), however, any worker across the sector needs to have at least a basic understanding of how wider society impacts on children and families, as well as the strategies they develop to deal with such forces (negatively or positively). This, of course, would be part of the required foundation needed to develop any equality based practice

Knowledge of child development is essential and included here but it is almost, again, set within a deficit approach in the sense that this knowledge is required in order to know what is missing and requires intervention. Yes indeed, this should be the case, but it should also be made clear that all staff within children's services must have this knowledge and understanding in order to provide the best possible service for all children that they are in contact with. They have a responsibility to support every child's development, in the most appropriate way, and in accordance with their role, for that child or young person.

We are pleased to see that children's rights are mentioned in many sections, but they are not given enough prominence. The UNCRC should be one of the first overarching values set out, and staff should be able to interpret and communicate the UNCRC to the children they work with and/or apply it to decision making processes at all levels of policy and practice. While there is a strong focus on intervention and prevention, and looking to

positively affect their future adult lives, which is necessary, it should not be forgotten that professionals who work with children, or who make decisions which affect children, have a huge role in determining the quality of their lives in the here and now.

We doubt any professional does not already understand this point, but we cannot overemphasise the need for all adults working with children to engage in respectful constructive relationships with children in the full knowledge that they can, and should, make a positive contribution to children's lives now, as well as for their future. This point also has a bearing on policy based decision making which, again, linking to the UNCRC, should have a rights based approach in terms of the overall provision and quality of children's services.

Displaying an understanding of the importance of play, and playfulness, would greatly enhance the experience of children in contact with professionals across the workforce. We agree, as set out, that communication skills are absolutely essential, with adults, in terms of families, other professionals, and with children and young people. While the importance of play in children's lives might be covered under the "understanding child development" aspect of the proposed common core; it is arguably worth setting this out as a category in itself. Play is a highly important part of child development and a useful framework for enabling children's participation and communication of their own views, as well as being useful to adults in communicating with children.

## **Implementation of the proposed Common Core**

6. Describe briefly how, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values?

Our organisation is a national umbrella organisation providing information, advice, training seminars, events and quality assurance development across the school age childcare sector. We have international links and share good practice nationally and internationally. At various points we have managed, developed and delivered specific resources to support the sector ( for example, Active Clubs, for healthy exercise). We also work on a policy level and conduct research, including seeking the views of children and families.

Our role would be to support the implementation of core skills by delivering information training and events to our sector on this and related topics. We would also include the common core skills in publicity about work in the sector and make them an integral part of our quality assurance work, which is firmly centred on the UNCRC.

Most of the core staff team have many years of experience of direct work with children and young people and are professionally qualified at post graduate level in related qualifications in child development and childhood

practice.

Our sector's role would be to implement the skills outlined, as well as those we suggest, in their day to day work with children, and in their work with their community and fellow professionals. As mentioned before, staff in school age childcare spend a lot of time getting to know and building up trusting relationships with the children and families they serve; they are well placed to deliver action on GIRFEC and all of the associated policy drivers.

### **Implementation of the proposed Common Core**

7. What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels?

- Strategic management
- Operational Management
- Day to day working with children, young people and families

School age childcare services could implement the common core at a strategic level by making a commitment to this practice in the developing of the aims and objectives of the organisation; the roles of the staff team and board, and in their role within the wider community. This would include links across professional boundaries such as with schools, health and social welfare agencies.

On an operational level, recruitment, job descriptions, training, and the design of the programme of practice would all be influenced. Setting up and maintaining links with the community is already a core part of the work of many services and this would be enhanced should there be a welcome dissolution of the professional barriers they often experience.

The value basis of the work in the UNCRC and the practical skills, reflective understanding, based on knowledge of children and childhood in society, and the development of trusting relationships with children and families would support child development and early intervention where needed. Aligned to this we would hope to see, firm and improved relationships with fellow professionals in order to provide holistic support to families and children.

8. What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations/sectors to implement the common core?

As a national organisation we would work with the SG and related agencies such as SSSC, as well as other children's organisations, COSLA, and we would be very happy to work with education and social work organisations nationally and locally. The sector could work collaboratively at many levels with health, social work, education and via the arts, sports and specialist

outdoor centres etc. We would all want to do more joint work with organisations supporting children with disabilities and families from minority ethnic communities.

9. What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

Resources and attitudes. It will take time to create a more unified children's workforce; there needs to be strong leadership across the professions and investment in successful pilots and a "change" fund to make this happen. The Highland model is oft quoted as a successful example of integrated work in this way, but this model was supported at the outset by the "Changing Children's Services Fund, as well as the undoubted willingness of participants to give up entrenched boundaries.

Strategic leadership from the top and listening to the messages from, for example, the Children in Scotland Working it Out programme, with innovation in developing new cross sector training and qualifications, which must not be stifled by silos or boundaries, or an unwillingness to change and develop. This is certainly an area where the school age childcare sector has a great deal of experience (change and development) and we would like to see opportunities for staff in this sector to develop wider career pathways.